

Camden Maiden Lane Project

Key Informant Interviews

Maiden Lane was a tenant-managed organization with a Board made up of residents who worked closely with staff seconded by Camden Council. At the time Kaizen was contracted, in February 2007, the relationships among Board members and staff were at a critical point, with no projects moving forward on the estate. There was no team spirit and no confidence in the Project Manager.

The following is a summary of data gathered through two key informant interviews with the following:

- Gordon MacQueen, Chair of Estate Management Board
- Kim Thompson, Acting Project Manager at Maiden Lane from December 2007

Project Outcomes

- Get Board to work as a team
- Get staff to work with the Board
- Create more positive feeling about their roles and responsibilities

Key Activities

Kaizen facilitated the following activities over a period of a year:

- Worked with Estate Management Board – helping members understand their roles and responsibilities and decision-making parameters.
- Board Chair received individual mentoring.
- Conducted an Away-Day with staff and Board members.
- Conducted housing survey as a way of involving and engaging residents in Council Decision making. Ninety of 480 residents were asked about their views of the estate, and the survey results were publicized and used by Council.
- Facilitated the selection of an Independent Tenant Advisor funded by the Council.
- Provided induction for new Board Members.

Short Term Outputs/Changes

From the perspective of the Board Chair, the work that Kaizen did provided a good model for how to discuss, resolve and advance problems that existed on the estate.

“I found myself able to think above the problems, and then come back and look at them again in a more relaxed and objective way. I could then see what could be done in various situations. I gained a belief that it was possible to do things that had previously seemed impossible. I also got personal support from Kaizen in how to follow up with those decisions.”

From the perspective of the interim Project Manager, Kaizen approached the main goal of improving relationships on a very personal level. They assessed people's personalities and their relationships and generally had staff and residents see things in a more positive way.

“Kaizen’s approach allowed everyone to step back and look at what’s going on. From that they became more assertive. So instead of all this anger and angst, they all became more professional in the way they were talking about their grievances.”

The following immediate changes resulted from the work with Kaizen:

- At the Away Day staff recognized that negativity was a serious issue and they identified they were unable to work with the Project Manager. It also allowed the Board to see that staff was not able to voice concerns because of the Project Manager.
- Kaizen supported the Board Chair to take the issue of the Project Manager to the Camden Executive. This person was subsequently removed from post.
- At Kaizen’s suggestion, Council agreed that staff could do pre-interviews with prospective candidates for the Project Manager position. This had never been done before, and helped to secure staffs’ confidence in the replacement manager.

Long Term Sustainable Impact

Both the interim Project Manager and the Board Chair agreed that the level of conflict in the situation would have taken a long time to sort out, if ever.

“It needed someone independent who was prepared to look outside the box. Kaizen kept supporting us to look for different solution, when most of us thought we’d tried our best and had given up.”

Interim Project Manager

“Fantastic thing about Kaizen is their ability to point out and identify some really good ideas and the potential for something to happen. They do this by pointing out how interaction/communication between people, in and of itself, makes a difference. The other great thing about Kaizen is that they don’t enforce anything. They present an opportunity, and leave you to choose. That kind of detachment is of great value.”

Board Chair

The following are concrete long-term benefits:

- Breakfast meetings between Board and staff, introduced by Kaizen after the Away Day, now happen every 6 weeks. *“They now have an opportunity to voice concerns, whereas before they were reliant on the manager to do that.”*
- Board capacity has increased, and they now recognize when they are not effective and seek help, e.g. recently took on a minute taker.
- Board are taking on more responsibility.
- Since January, the Board and staff are working effectively together to implement projects, e.g. a new parking scheme and new CCTV system.

“None of this would have happened if the right person had not been there. You needed someone with enough insight to really assess what was going on. There were lots of underlying issues that Kaizen had to figure out and not many people could have done it.”